

CITY PONDERING 'WALTERIA LAKE' PROBLEMS, SEEKS FLOOD SOLUTION



CITY'S PROBLEMS . . . This aerial view, looking south, shows the 300-acre problems which faces the city—Walteria Lake. Used to grow celery most of the year, the basin is filled with two or three feet of water now as the result of recent rains. The city has placed a ban on building until some solution of the drainage problem can be found.

Running through the center of the lake, partly under water, is Ocean Ave. Some flooding also was reported in the area north of the lake and can be seen in spots at the bottom of the picture, below 228th St. The finger-shaped building at the bottom of the picture is Riviera Hospital.

Several Plans Studied by Engineers, City Officials

By TOM RISCHE
Herald Staff Writer

With the march of progress which has seen Torrance grow from a sleepy little town of 12,000 in 1946 to a bustling city of 97,000 today, many residents have wondered why one sprawling area—commonly known as "Walteria Lake"—went undeveloped.

Although houses and businesses have sprung up all around a 300-acre area northwest of Hawthorne Ave. and Pacific Coast Hwy., Walteria Lake is a green area covered with celery and other vegetables most of the year.

Anybody who has driven by Walteria Lake lately knows now why nothing has been built there. The lake, finally is living up to its name, covered with one to three feet of water, the result of recent five-inch rains.

"No Building Allowed"
Despite pressure from subdividers and developers, the city has placed a "no building allowed" sign on all property in the area which is below the 75 foot level.

During the summertime, subdividers looked at the green celery fields and laughed.

"Walteria Lake problem?" they scoffed. "What problem?"
"Just wait a while," said the city. "You'll see."

Recent rains justified the city's attitude. It became apparent that if houses had been built in the area, the people who would have bought them would now be splashing from room to room, knee-deep in water. As it was, residents in a few homes on the edge of the lake did get water in their homes and the muddy waters lapped at the doors of still others.

What Is the Problem?
What is the "Walteria Lake problem?"

This huge area, probably the largest single undeveloped piece of ground in Torrance, is the lowest spot in the area. Since water always runs downhill, Walteria Lake is the place where the water from heavy rains always collects.

The problem is made worse by the fact that to the west and south are high hills, to the north is higher ground, and to the east, there is no place to send the water without building huge, expensive storm drains. Besides, during heavy rains, the area to the

east has a hard time getting rid of its own water and does not want to take care of Torrance as well.

No One Bothered
Until recently, Walteria Lake didn't bother anyone very much. During heavy rains, Pacific Coast Hwy. and Hawthorne were under water, but nobody cared much about the land which was subject to periodic flooding. Old maps dating back to 1880 indicate that the area was then considered a lake.

Walteria Lake, however, became a problem as the city grew and surrounding areas were filled with houses. Ground which formerly would have soaked up some of the water was covered with houses and streets, so more water went into the "lake".

Aside from the potential health and safety hazard, there was the fact that a lot of good land was going to waste. It was a big city drainage problem, although drains were placed under a rebuilt Hawthorne Ave. so that the water would not run over the road. In addition, the city was losing valuable tax revenues from houses and businesses which might be located there if the flooding danger could be eliminated.

What to Do?
For the past few years, the city fathers have been faced with the question, "What shall we do about Walteria Lake?"

At this stage, there seem to be three possibilities:

1. A huge storm tunnel to the ocean.
2. A huge retention basin to hold the water.
3. A big lake.

The current plan in most favor with city officials is to construct a huge 10-foot storm tunnel which would send the waters of Walteria Lake gurgling off harmlessly into the Pacific Ocean. As drawn up by the City Engineer, this storm drain would drain the entire area west of Hawthorne Ave. between Torrance Blvd. and the Palos Verdes line.

Large Cost
Building such a gigantic storm tunnel would cost an estimated \$4.5 million, however. Los Angeles County engineers have lent their support to the project and have recommended that the city receive \$2.5 million, if a proposed county-wide storm drain bond issue is placed on the ballot and passed. The Walteria project

has been given a number one priority.

As envisioned by the city engineer, the storm tunnel would drain not only Walteria Lake, but the oft-flooded Paseo de Gracia and El Retire Park areas and the Seaside and Southwood areas. The storm drain would run east on Pacific Coast Hwy., turning north at Calle Mayor and running east to Ocean Ave., where it would turn north, connecting at Sepulveda Blvd. It would drain the area now served by a number of sumps.

Other Possibilities
Other possibilities for draining the area include building a retention basin of some 30 to 45 acres which would be about 30 feet deep. It has been suggested that water from these basins could be stored until rainstorms are over and then pumped into a drainage system connecting with the Bixby Slough to the east. Releasing the water in this way would not add to the flood problems of Lomita, Harbor City, and Wilmington.

Another possibility is the storage of the water in a retention basin and letting it seep down through the ground to replenish the underground waters of the West Basin.

Another suggested proposal would include a development similar to that around Westlake Park in Los Angeles, with a huge lake and surrounding commercial developments.

Where to Get Money?

All of these suggestions cost money, however, and lots of it. To date, nobody has been able to suggest just where the money should come from.

A proposal that the city join an Urban Redevelopment Authority is currently under study. Under this plan, the city would purchase the land, with federal aid, and build a retention basin to hold the excess water.

Might Sell Land

When the drainage problem has been solved, the city could sell the land at a higher price to cover cost of the flood control facilities as well as the original land purchase. At the present time, the land west of Hawthorne is owned by some eight or 10 people, while areas subject to flooding east of Hawthorne are owned by some 200 persons.

There is some question whether Torrance would be eligible for federal aid under the Urban Redevelopment

Plan, which is designed to help cities with "blighted areas." Whether the Walteria Lake area would be considered "blighted" under the federal act is being studied. As practiced in the East, "blighted" usually means present areas of substandard housing, which are removed to make for modern developments.

Long-Term Problem
The problem still is far from solved and once a decision is reached, it probably will be several years before the drainage system can be completed.

Observers expect that some day the present Walteria Lake will be a bustling area of up to 2500 homes and a large commercial development. It is located only a mile from the large Del Amo Shopping Center, an area which will become increasingly important to Torrance.

The problem is likely to get worse before it gets better, however. Only twice within the last 20 years has the "lake" been as large as it is today—in 1943 and 1952—but weathermen predict that wetter weather may be in store.

"Wet Cycle" Returning
If weather forecasters are right, the "dry cycle" of the past few years should be replaced soon by a "wet cycle" of even more rain. Despite a six-inch rain on Jan. 25, 1956, the lake was not flooded because of the previously dry season. This year, however, a three-inch rain filled the lake because the ground already was saturated.

Looking ahead, the weathermen believe that wetter years may be coming if this is so, the "Walteria Lake problem" may get bigger before it gets smaller.

REV. ANGER SETS TOPIC

Rev. Ray Anger will speak on "The Contagion of Belief" at the Torrance Religious Science meeting Sunday evening at 7:30 at the YWCA, 2320 W. Carson St.

Mrs. Glen Keller is arranging special music, and Mrs. Warren Shipley and her committee will provide refreshments for the "get-acquainted time" which will follow the service.

Plans will be made for a men's barbecue dinner as suggested by Larry Robb and other men of the group.

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TORRANCE, CALIFORNIA, THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 1958

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PLANT DOUBLED . . . First views of the expanded Torrance Division plant of the Ryan Aeronautical Company, showing the three new buildings (to right of saw-toothed structure) which are nearing completion. New structures will double plant floor space, bringing it to 277,000 square

feet, to provide for increased production of Ryan Firebee jet target drones for the Air Force and Navy and jet engine pods and pylons for the Douglas DC-8 jetliner. Torrance Division work force, now at 500, is scheduled to reach 1700 in 1959.



PRODUCTION ROLLS . . . Firebee assembly lines are rolling at volume production rates in the new, expanded Torrance Division plant of the Ryan Aeronautical Company. Fastest target drone missile in operational use with the Air Force and Navy, the Firebee flies at 600 miles

per hour, above 50,000 feet altitude and for durations of more than one hour. Ryan Firebees are widely used to evaluate air-to-air and ground-to-air missiles at numerous air force bases, with both Atlantic and Pacific Fleets and by the Royal Canadian Air Force.